

# Montgomery energy tax payments expected to soar with heat

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Montgomery County will rake in more dollars with each degree sweltering residents crank up their air conditioning.

Officials passed a 150 percent energy tax increase for homeowners the next two years, and supporters, such as County Executive Ike Leggett, called the spike largely avoidable since residents can control how much power they use.

But frugality is taking a back seat to summer relief, residents' bills show.

Arthur Salzberg, of Chevy Chase, said his energy taxes rose from \$9.21 in May to \$63.40 in June and lashed out at county leaders for downplaying the increase.

"Clumsy efforts to mask or hide enormous tax increases as something other than what they are ought to be beneath responsible leadership and elected officials who would claim the public's trust," he wrote to County Council members.

Residents are charged 1.3 cents per kilowatt-hour of electricity use and 11.5 cents per therm of natural gas, under rates that went into effect July 1, according to Pepco, the area's largest electricity provider. By comparison, rates were half a cent per kilowatt-hour and 4 cents per therm respectively prior to filling a \$1 billion budget gap this year.

"I was a little shocked when I received June's Pepco bill with a Montgomery County energy tax of \$41.63 after my May bill showed an energy tax of \$7.31," Gaithersburg's Ray Schmid also wrote the council.

The soaring energy bills last month, however, were tied to a temporary -- even larger -- energy tax increase council members passed in May just to

make it through last fiscal year. Residents saw their energy taxes jump more than 300 percent until the end of June.

Leggett contended steeper energy taxes were passed out of necessity, not as a deceptive way to raise cash.

"We don't like this increase any more than anyone else," said spokesman Patrick Lacefield. "Barring an increase in this tax, however, county government would have been required to make even deeper reductions in county services."

County officials say they have not received revenue figures from the new energy taxes. But they estimate residents will pay \$150 more in energy taxes this year, totaling \$250.

Read more at the Washington Examiner:

<http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/local/Montgomery-energy-tax-payments-expected-to-soar-with-heat-98143519.html#ixzz0tTla1qpe>